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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the need for American Indians in the medical profession and urges Native American students to apply to medical school. In the United States 45% of the Indian population is less than 20 years old, compared to 32% of total population. Focusing attention on the health of Indian youth is important. The death rate for Indians is 1.4 times the national rate for ages 1-14 and 1.7 times the national rate for ages 15-24. Indian adolescents have higher "ever used" rates for alcohol and drugs than non-Indian youth. Stimulating Indian youth to attend medical school or other health professional schools is an important step to preserving the future. In the past 8-10 years, however, medical schools have experienced declining enrollment at a rate of 6% per year. Young people may be discouraged by the high tuition costs and length of time required to prepare for practice. It is important to convince students that medical education provides them with an opportunity for a lifetime of service to other people. Medical schools should recognize that the health needs of American Indians require a cadre of committed physicians who understand American Indian culture and the ways to accomplish health goals within that structure. Scientific and technological advances are proceeding at a staggering rate, and opportunities in the medical profession are greater than ever before. (SV)

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MEDICAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS

by

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PRESENTATION TO ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN INDIAN PHYSICIANS

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE 1989 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN INDIAN PHYSICIANS. IT IS A GREAT HONOR FOR ME AND I AM VERY APPRECIATIVE OF IT.

LET ME BEGIN BY ADDING MY WELCOME TO OKLAHOMA CITY. OKLAHOMA AS YOU KNOW HAS A GREAT INDIAN HERITAGE OF WHICH WE ARE QUITE PROUD. FURTHERMORE YOUR ASSOCIATION HAS ITS HOME OFFICE HERE IN OKLAHOMA CITY. ALL IN ALL, I HOPE YOU ENJOY YOUR VISIT HERE AND THAT YOU GET AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SOME OF WHAT OKLAHOMA CITY HAS TO OFFER. I MAY APPEAR SOMEWHAT BIASED BUT I AM A NATIVE OF OKLAHOMA CITY AND I HAVE JUST RECENTLY RETURNED HOME AFTER BEING GONE FOR NEARLY 19 YEARS. IT IS A GREAT FEELING.

LET ME ALSO WELCOME YOU ON BEHALF OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA COLLEGE OF MEDICINE. NOW IN OUR 89TH YEAR OF EXISTENCE, WE ARE VERY PROUD OF OUR ALUMNI. INCLUDED AMONG THOSE ALUMNI OF COURSE ARE YOUR PRESIDENT DR. JIM HAMPTON, THE DIRECTOR OF THE INDIAN SERVICE DR. EVERETT RHOADES AND AT LEAST ONE OF THE OTHER SPEAKERS ON THE AGENDA FOR THIS MEETING. I HOPE YOU WILL AGREE THAT IT IS AN IMPRESSIVE GROUP OF PEOPLE. IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, THE VALUE AND STRENGTH OF ANY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION IS CONTAINED IN ITS ALUMNI. THAT IS ALSO TRUE OF US AND WE FEEL GOOD ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTIONS THAT OUR COLLEGE OF MEDICINE HAS

MADE TO THE HEALTH OF ALL PEOPLE.

THE THEME OF THIS MEETING OF COURSE IS HEALTHY INDIAN YOUTH: PATHWAYS TO PRESERVING THE FUTURE. I AM VERY IMPRESSED BY THAT THEME. CLEARLY HEALTHY INDIAN YOUTH IS IMPORTANT TO ALL OF US. IT IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT HOWEVER IN THE NATIVE AMERICAN POPULATION BECAUSE ACCORDING TO THE MOST RECENT DATA THAT I COULD OBTAIN, 45% OF THE INDIAN POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES IS LESS THAN 20 YEARS OLD. THAT COMPARES TO 32% FOR THE ENTIRE U.S. POPULATION. FURTHERMORE THE MEDIAN AGE OF NATIVE AMERICANS IS 22 YEARS WHILE THAT OF ALL AMERICANS IS 32 YEARS, A RATHER DRAMATIC DIFFERENCE. HENCE FOCUSING ATTENTION ON YOUTH AT THIS TIME IS IMPORTANT. HOWEVER I WAS INTRIGUED BY THE PHRASE PRESERVING THE FUTURE. SO I LOOKED UP THE MEANING OF THE WORD PRESERVE IN MY WEBSTERS DICTIONARY. I FIND THAT THE FIRST DEFINITION IS "TO KEEP SAFE FROM INJURY, HARM OR DESTRUCTION". INDEED THE TWO MAJOR SYNONYMS ARE PROTECTING AND MAINTAINING. CLEARLY OUR FUTURE IS DEPENDENT UPON OUR YOUTH AND THEREFORE UPON THEIR BEING HEALTHY.

YET THE YOUTH IN THE UNITED STATES ARE UNDER THREAT. THE RISING INCIDENCE OF DRUG ABUSE, ALCOHOLISM, SUICIDE, HOMICIDE AND ACCIDENTS SHOULD GIVE US ALL CAUSE FOR ALARM. ALL OF THESE TO A GREATER OR LESSER EXTENT ARE PREVENTABLE ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NOT YET FIGURED OUT HOW TO BE TOTALLY SUCCESSFUL AT IT. AMONG INDIAN YOUTH THE PROBLEM IS EVEN MORE SEVERE. FOR EXAMPLE THE OVERALL DEATH RATE FOR INDIANS 1-14 YEARS OF AGE IS 1.4 TIMES THAT OF THE

UNITED STATES AS A WHOLE AND THAT INCREASES TO 1.7 FOR PERSONS 15-24 YEARS OF AGE. IN BOTH CASES ACCIDENTS ARE THE LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH WITH MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS BEING THE MORE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTOR.

WHEN ONE EXAMINES ALCOHOLISM AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE DATA, SEVERAL SIGNIFICANT ITEMS STAND OUT. IN THE FIRST PLACE THE MORTALITY RATE FROM ALCOHOLISM AMONG INDIANS HAS DECREASED DRAMATICALLY BETWEEN 1970 AND 1986 ALTHOUGH IT REMAINS MARKEDLY HIGHER THAN THAT OF THE UNITED STATES AS A WHOLE. AMONG YOUTH, THE SCHOOL, COMMUNITY BASED ALCOHOLISM AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION SURVEY REVEALS THAT ABOUT 85% OF 7TH-12TH GRADE INDIAN STUDENTS HAD TRIED ALCOHOL, ABOUT 60% MARIJUANA, ABOUT 25% INHALANTS AND NEARLY 20% STIMULANTS. FOR ALMOST ALL SUBSTANCES INDIAN ADOLESCENTS REPORTED HIGHER "EVER TRIED" RATES THAN DID NON-INDIANS. FURTHERMORE THIS USAGE BEGINS EARLIER IN LIFE. THESE ARE FRIGHTENING DATA. THE ISSUE FACING US IS WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT.

STIMULATING INDIAN YOUTH TO ATTEND MEDICAL SCHOOL OR INDEED ATTEND OTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS IS AN IMPORTANT STEP TO PRESERVING THE FUTURE. FOR THE PAST 8-10 YEARS, MEDICAL SCHOOLS HAVE SEEN A DECLINING APPLICANT POOL. INDEED UNTIL THE PAST TWO YEARS IT HAD BEEN DECLINING AT A RATE OF ABOUT 6% PER YEAR. THAT RATE OF DECLINE HAS SLOWED SOMEWHAT BUT NEVERTHELESS IT IS CLEAR THAT MEDICINE HAS LOST SOME OF ITS APPEAL. CLEARLY PHYSICIANS MUST PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN ENCOURAGING BRIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE TO

SEEK MEDICAL CAREERS. OUR MEDICAL STUDENTS HAVE RECENTLY DEVELOPED AN AUDIOVISUAL PRESENTATION TO TRY TO ENCOURAGE HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS TO CONSIDER MEDICINE AS A CAREER. I THINK IT IS A VERY GOOD PRESENTATION THAT INCLUDES MUCH OF THE MORE EXCITING PARTS OF MEDICAL STUDENT LIFE AS WELL AS THE PRACTICE OF MEDICINE. HOWEVER THERE ARE TWO ASPECTS THAT ARE SOMEWHAT FRIGHTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE. THE FIRST OF THESE IS THE LENGTH OF TIME REQUIRED TO PREPARE ONESELF FOR PRACTICE. TYPICALLY THAT TIME FROM GRADUATION FROM HIGH SCHOOL IS 11-18 YEARS. FOR AN 18 YEAR OLD SENIOR IN HIGH SCHOOL, THE POSSIBILITY OF SPENDING FOUR YEARS IN COLLEGE, FOUR YEARS IN MEDICAL SCHOOL, AND A MINIMUM OF THREE YEARS AS A RESIDENT LOOKS LIKE A LIFE TIME. A SECOND ISSUE IS THAT OF THE COST. MEDICAL SCHOOL TUITIONS ARE HIGHER THAN THOSE OF VIRTUALLY EVERY OTHER PROFESSION AND WHEN COUPLED WITH THE TIME, IT CAN APPEAR TO BE AN OVERWHELMING PROPOSITION. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE WHEN YOU COMPARE MEDICAL EDUCATION TO OTHER PROFESSIONS. IN LAW, THE TYPICAL PERIOD OF TIME IS SIX OR SEVEN YEARS OF EDUCATION; IN BUSINESS THE TIME REQUIRED IS FOUR TO SIX YEARS, ENGINEERING FIVE YEARS AND SO ON AND SO FORTH. HENCE, MY OWN VIEW IS THAT WE MUST CONVINCE YOUNG PEOPLE THAT MEDICAL EDUCATION PROVIDES THEM WITH AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A LIFE TIME OF SERVICE TO OTHER PEOPLE. THERE IS REAL JOY IN BEING ABLE TO DO SOMETHING FOR SOMEONE ELSE AND TO IMPACT OTHER PEOPLES LIVES. IT IS AN EXCITING LIFE AND THIS IS CLEARLY ONE OF THE MORE EXCITING TIMES TO BE IN IT. NEVERTHELESS, I WOULD URGE YOU TO DO WHATEVER YOU CAN TO ENCOURAGE BRIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE TO CONSIDER MEDICINE AS A CAREER

AND TO SEEK OUT INFORMATION ABOUT IT.

ACCORDING TO THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN MEDICAL COLLEGES THE NUMBER OF APPLICANTS PROFESSING TO BE NATIVE AMERICANS INCLUDED 123 IN 1987, 114 IN 1988, AND 136 IN 1989. THAT GIVES A GRAND TOTAL OF 373 APPLICANTS FROM 1987 THROUGH 1989. OF THOSE 167 WERE WOMEN. THE IMPORTANT CONCLUSION IS THAT THE ACCEPTANCE RATE IS HIGH FOR INDIAN APPLICANTS. THIS PAST ACADEMIC YEAR THERE WERE A TOTAL OF 237 NATIVE AMERICANS ENROLLED IN ALL AMERICAN MEDICAL SCHOOLS OUT OF A TOTAL OF 65,300. AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA ASSUMING THAT ALL OF THE STUDENTS THAT WE HAVE ACCEPTED ACTUALLY ENROLL, WE WILL HAVE 22 AMERICAN INDIANS OUT OF A TOTAL OF 532 STUDENTS IN OUR MEDICAL STUDENT BODY. FOR THIS YEAR'S ENTERING CLASS, WE HAD 30 APPLICANTS, 11 OF WHICH WERE NON-RESIDENTS AND 14 ACCEPTED. THE TOTAL APPLICANT POOL WAS 808 WITH 203 OFFERED ACCEPTANCE. THE YEAR BEFORE WE HAD ONLY 12 INDIAN APPLICANTS OUT OF A TOTAL OF 702. HOWEVER, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE INCREASE THE NUMBER OF INDIANS APPLYING.

WHY SHOULD MEDICAL SCHOOLS BE INTERESTED IN INDIAN YOUTH? WELL OBVIOUSLY IN THE FIRST PLACE BECAUSE THEY ARE BRIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE AND WE MUST BE INTERESTED IN ALL SUCH PEOPLE IF WE ARE TO FULFILL OUR OBJECT OF GRADUATING COMPETENT PHYSICIANS. SECOND HOWEVER IS THE NEED FOR GRADUATING PHYSICIANS WHO HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING OF INDIAN CULTURAL AND HERITAGE. OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE IS AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTOR TO OUR PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIORS TOWARDS HEALTH ISSUES. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE PRECISE MESSAGE REQUIRED TO

CHANGE BEHAVIOR IN PEOPLE VARIES ACCORDING TO THEIR VIEWS ABOUT HEALTH. MEDICINE MUST HAVE PEOPLE WITH AN INNATE UNDERSTANDING AND FEEL FOR THOSE BELIEFS. HENCE IT IS VITAL THAT MEDICINE BE BROADLY REPRESENTATIVE OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY AND THAT INCLUDES NATIVE AMERICANS. THIRD ARE THE FACTS THAT I CITED EARLIER ABOUT THE HEALTH STATUS OF INDIANS. WITH MORTALITY RATES FROM MOST CAUSES OF DEATH THAT EXCEED THOSE OF NON-INDIANS IT IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT THAT ATTENTION BE PAID TO THOSE PROBLEMS. THAT REQUIRES A CADRE OF COMMITTED AND WELL INFORMED PHYSICIANS WHO SHARE AND THEREFORE UNDERSTAND THE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND WAYS TO ACCOMPLISH HEALTH GOALS WITHIN THAT STRUCTURE. FINALLY IT IS VITAL THAT WE PROVIDE THE YOUTH OF OUR COUNTRY WITH EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP THEMSELVES TO ACHIEVE THEIR OWN PERSONAL GOALS. THEY MUST BE WILLING TO WORK TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THOSE OPPORTUNITIES BUT THE OPPORTUNITIES MUST BE THERE. I AM COMMITTED TO THAT GOAL FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA COLLEGE OF MEDICINE WITH VERY SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF RECRUITING, RETAINING AND GRADUATING AN INCREASING NUMBER OF NATIVE AMERICANS.

THE OPPORTUNITIES IN MEDICINE TODAY ARE STAGGERING TO SAY THE LEAST. THE SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES ARE COMING AT A VERY RAPID RATE AND MOST OF THEM RESULT IN IMPROVEMENTS IN THE HEALTH STATUS OF PEOPLE. MORE SPECIFIC AND EFFECTIVE DRUGS, IMPROVEMENTS IN SURGERY AND ANESTHESIA, AND NEW TECHNOLOGY THAT MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO VISUALIZE PARTS OF THE HUMAN BODY THAT HERETOFORE COULD BE VISUALIZED ONLY BY SURGERY OR BY PAINFUL AND HIGH RISK TECHNIQUES. ALL OF THESE HAVE MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR MEDICINE TO

OFFER MORE TO MORE PEOPLE THAN EVER BEFORE IN HISTORY. THAT TREND WILL CONTINUE FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE AND INDEED MEDICAL STUDENTS BEGINNING THEIR STUDIES THIS FALL WILL DO MORE FOR MORE PEOPLE THAN THEIR TEACHERS EVER DREAMED OF. THE GREATEST NEED IN THE AMERICAN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM AT THE PRESENT TIME IS PRIMARY CARE. AND BY PRIMARY CARE I AM TALKING ABOUT COMPREHENSIVE CONTINUING CARE. TO FEW OF OUR STUDENTS SEEK PRIMARY DISCIPLINES AS THEIR CAREER. THEY ARE OVERWHELMED BY THE RESPONSIBILITIES THAT THEY WILL ASSUME AND WE ARE TRYING TO ADDRESS THAT.

THE OPPORTUNITIES IN MEDICINE ARE GREATER THAN THEY HAVE EVER BEEN. YET WE STILL SEE TOO FEW APPLICATIONS FROM NATIVE AMERICANS AND TOO FEW ENROLLED IN MEDICAL SCHOOLS. THAT MUST CHANGE. WE ARE COMMITTED TO CHANGING IT AND I WOULD ASK FOR YOUR HELP IN DOING SO. I WOULD ASK YOU TO IDENTIFY BRIGHT YOUNG INDIAN YOUTH. ENCOURAGE THEM TO SEEK A MEDICAL EDUCATION. BE HONEST WITH THEM ABOUT THE DIFFICULTIES BUT SHARE WITH THEM THE EXCITEMENT AND THE JOY THAT YOU FEEL FROM BEING A PHYSICIAN. WITHOUT THAT, WE WILL IMPROVE AND INDEED WE MUST IMPROVE.

MY WARM BEST WISHES AND DEEP GRATITUDE FOR YOUR INVITATION AND MY BEST WISHES FOR A MOST SUCCESSFUL MEETING.